The Revolutionary Spirit In LeRoi Jones ' Dutchman

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Abstract

Literature is a revolution in the sense that it motivates people to think, see and then speak. That is the aim of literature which is to stimulate people to revolt against what is corrupted and wrong in society. LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Barka) (1934) is one of black writers who employs his literary talent to defend his nationality. Throughout his works, he tries to show the racial discrimination towards black people in a society which values white ethics as superior over black inferiority.

الملخص

الأدب هو ثورة بمعنى أنه يحفز الناس على الثورة ثم الرؤية ومن ثم الكلام. وهذا هو هدف الأدب الذي يستميل الناس إلى الثورة والتمرد ضد كل ما هو فاسد وخطا بالمجتمع. لي روي جونز المسمى امامو أميري بركة هو احد الكتاب السود الذي وظف موهبته الأدبية للدفاع عن جنسيته . من خلال أعماله حاول بيان التميز العنصري الذي يكنه المجتمع ضد السود ذلك المجتمع الذي يقيم أخلاقيات البيض كقيمة عليا على دونية السود.

1- Introduction

LeRoi Jones is one of the black writes who devoted his life to talk about his black followers. He exploits theatre to draw the audience attention to the predicament of his people . Indeed, Jones was loyal to use his pen to put black case in the vertex of events. He has certain views about theatre and the function of black artists. His philosophy about theatre is that theatre should be an institution which encourages change . It is not only a place of entertainment but also a space which opens the audience attention to hidden things in their society . In other words, it encourages people to revolt against injustice. In his Home, a collection of essays, he admits that ;

The revolutionary theatre should force change, it should be change… The revolutionary theatre must expose !Show up insides of these humans ,look into black skulls. White people will cower before this theatre because it hates them .Because they themselves have been trained to hate .

He also adds that; The revolutionary theatre must take dreams and give them a reality …. It must be food for all those who need food , and daring propaganda for the beauty of the Human Mind. It is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fat bellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on.

Moreover, LeRoi Jones sheds light on the blood relationship of blacks and ask the audience to be one with them . He refers to the fact that theatre should present black people as victims to gain audience sympathy. He said;

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are victims if they are blood brothers.(1)

He goes further in his claims to the extent that he asks black writers to destroy America . He thinks that it is their genuine role and message . In the conclusion of his Home, he said ;

The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil. (2)

In this context, Joseph Conrad once said "my best task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you feel –it is, before all, to make you see. That–no more , and it is everything."(3)

The aim of many writers is to make an audience see. They exploit theatre to show people what happens on reality. Le Roi Jones argues , in several essays called in a collection called Home, that the black writer , such as Jones, who by his very status as outsider may be equipped to see American society with special clarity, will inevitably be opposed by the white establishments which imposed on writers certain rules that writers , accordingly, see only what glorifies the establishment, America.

Le Roi Jones is one of the writers who has been harassed by the public officials who claim that this revolutionary vision is a threat to public morality .Jones takes on his shoulders the task of picturing American life with all its contradictions. He calls for a theatre who presents the negative side of America for the sake of change. Jones burns his pen for this aim. Several quotations from

the revolutionary theatre (included in Home) gives the gist of his position as showed above.

Thus, Jones assumes that art is enormously potent, and in doing so he takes his place in a tradition that can be traced back to Chekhov, Shakespeare, and Plato. Chekhov said that he wrote his plays to make people see their lives which are dreary and to make them create a better life for themselves. While

Shakespeare whose Hamlet had heard that "guilty creatures sitting at a play " may see their own image on the stage and may be moved to "proclaim" their malefactions.

Also Jones' views can be associated with Plato, who in the fourth century B.C. argued that the tragic dramatist should be barred from the ideal commonwealth precisely because they have the power to stir up pity and terror in men and thus to obscure men's rational faculty. For Plato the emotional effect at dramatic art is harmful. People ought not to be stirred by such emotions . In any case, the doctrine of catharsis tends to be seen as counter-revolutionary ; it stimulates the passions in order world.(4)

Acceptance of the daily world with all its contradictions is intolerable to Jones, for whom psychic health depends not on calm acceptance but on drastically changed social conditions. This is truly the message Jones calls for. Jones employs theatre to stimulate others to revolt against sickness in American society . It is not a place for entertainment but a window for others to see, watch and revolt.

2- Le Roi Jones ' <u>Dutchman</u>

In his play, Dutchman, LeRoi Jones has dealt with black case. The title of the play is suggestive since it reminds the audience of black origin. Dutchmen are the first slaves who arrived America.

From the outset of the play, Jones makes use of stage directions to show the clear discrimination between white and black which is represented by two main characters . The dim lights and darkness versus clear lights are associated with Clay and Lula.

In Dutchman, Jones shows us an intolerable society. He does this not by abstract preaching but by vividly setting forth on the stage characters engaged in a human relationship. Jones has denied that Clay and Lula, two different poles, are symbols: they are he says, real people in a real world. At the same time, however, he admits that these characters are not only individuals but are recognized human types.

Lula, for all her alleged sanity, just barely reflects the insanity of this hideous place. And Clay is a young boy trying desperately to become a man. Dutchman is about the difficulty of becoming a man in America. It is very difficult , to be sure, if you are black, but I think it is now much harder to become one if you are white. In fact, you will find a very few white American males with the slightest knowledge of what manhood involves. They are too busy running the world, or running from it.

Jones presents Lula in such a way that we see her, know her, and he does this as a dramatist must, by endowing the character with gestures and with language that ring true. At the beginning of the play, we see her as a fairly common type, vulgar and aggressive. She says that Clay was starring " in the vicinity of my ass" and before she tosses her apple core onto the floor of the

subway car wraps it in a Kleenex. Through such bits of dialogue and such gestures a very real human being is rendered visible to us – but our perception of her reality is partly indebted to our recognition of her as a type. Moreover, she is not just one of millions of people whose special sort at coarseness reveals itself in ludicrous attempts at being genteel; she also a femme fatale(5) , woman who seeks out a victims, an eve tempting Adam with her apple- specifically the white woman who, surrounded by the myth of purity, lures black men to their destruction. From the very beginning of the play, the enmity between the two poles broke out. Early in her conversation with Clay, Lula admits that she sought him out, and that she often lies because "it helps me control the world"(6). Lula , we can say, while never ceasing to be a specific woman who encounters a specific man on the subway- at least in part stands for or embodies the white society that Jones sees as enslaving all blacks.

Clay, the black man , is a young boy trying desperately to become a man. Lula soon sees his effort to mature: "you look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow beard." She knows him well because he is , as she says, "a well known type," and she later calls to Clay " attention that they have all the white been talking about his manhood. The kind of man Clay wants to be is clear to Lula and us alike from his clothing :

Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition
you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right
do you have to be wearing. Three-button suit and striped
tie ? Your grandfather was a slave, he did not go to Harvard.

From this extract we see the humiliation of white to black- the blacks are treated as slaves. Clay is, Lula says, a "middle-class black bastard….. you ain't no

nigger, you're just a dirty white man." Clay half knows that he is trying to surrender his black identity, and he also knows that he embodies the slaves murderous impulses toward his white oppressor. But Clay's bourgeois aspirations enslave him, and rather than achieve manhood by murdering his oppressor. Clay makes a mistake of thinking that murder can be avoided .He said "I sit here, in this buttoned- up suit, to keep myself from cutting your throats." Clay's self-imprisoned in the white man's clothes, thinks he is achieving manhood but he is ensuring his own destruction. The white oppressor knows that in white America the white must murder the blacks or the whites will be murdered by the blacks. Clay is humiliated by his white society because he is rejected by it. He is looked at as undesirable man. He is intruder not original. He has artificial pedigree. Having picturing this, Jones wants people to revolt against their oppressors.

Writing for blacks has always been a political act. The blacks always believed that the creation of art, could play a significant role in their dubious political status. Gates points out that the "first predictions of renaissance of Black literature and art"(7), made by William Stanley Braithwaite in 1901, precisely overlap W.E.B Dubois's efforts to form an organization lobbying for Black rights. The civil rights movements of the 1960's and Black power and women's liberation movement have cast a significant shadow in the works of all major black writers like Amiri Baraka , Ralph Ellison, Toni Cade, Alex Haley and Morrison. Black Americans have written in a fine fitting phrase a " literature of necessity ." They have recorded in these writings their experiences as manifested in their common adjustment to political and social climate in America, which has primarily determined the shape and the content of their literature. This quest for identity is the quintessential quality of all black fiction. Black literature reflects the black man's self-definition in regard to the oppressive socio-political climate.

The study of African-American literature has received fresh boost from the newly revised theories of culture. No culture today is seen either static or complete in itself. Earlier when colonialism was expanding, anthropology revolved around the notion that the culture of the Anglo-Saxon world represented peak of civilization. The colonized people, were seen as a historic objects, and were expected to develop under colonial rule. The evolutionary theory had earlier posited race, biology, heredity as integrated conceptual complex and attempted to explain cultural differences in terms of genetic

differences. today studies have shown that in genetic terms, the physical and biological differences between groups defined as races are only trivial. Racism is defined as a habit of thought, that was expanded into a theory to justify the hard and fast economic interests of the Europeans. Race is conceptualized as an unstable and complex of social meaning constantly transformed by political struggle.

Black literature also draws our attention to certain ideals which were submerged under a deluge of myths promulgated by the official histories whites had written. This could help us towards a newer understanding of racial and cultural myths and various discriminatory practices that lie embedded in Western historical thinking. For generations and centuries, the official history written down in the archives of history has usually been the history of the dominant class. Judith Newton suggests a parallel between the revisionary return to history and the emergence of feminist, African-American and the post colonial writings. Literature of African countries and a country like India too have been a vehicle to express a countries social change. Amiri Baraka takes the black Art to another dimension that is revolution against sickness in society . in doing so, he stimulated people to revolt against wrongs. He has a message that humans are created equal. So, there is no borders between them .

Notes

1- LeRoi Jones, " The Revolutionary Theatre ," (Liberator : HarperCollins Publisher), 5 July 1965,pp.4-6.

2- LeRoi Jones, **Home** (USA : The Sterling Lord Agency , Inc., 1966) , p. 210-213.

3- Curtis LeMay: U.S. Air Force general who advocated aggressive military policies during the Cold War and , in 1965, in Vietnam.

4- Many Belgian priests and nuns were massacred in 1960 during the Belgian Congo's tumultuous transition from colony to independence.

5- LeRoi Jones, **Home** (USA : The Sterling Lord Agency , Inc., 1966) , p. 210-213.

6- Sylvan Barnet et al, **Types of Drama : Plays and Essays**. 4th edition (USA : Little, Brown and Company, 1985), p. 287. All subsequent quotations will be to this edition.

7- B. S. Field, ***Twentieth Century Literature***. Vol. 18, No.1 (January 1972):19-24.